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“Put on the whole armor of God”

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Russian and Chinese presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping

RUMORS OF WAR—Just What is Going On?

In the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke we are told one of the signs of coming tribulations would be “rumors of war.” This particular sign has indeed returned most recently with increased concerns, vigorously alerting the world of growing tensions and threats between the United States and NATO **staring down** China and Russia. Are we witnessing another “Cold War” emerging, or something far worse in magnitude?

By **BILL WATSON**

Many of our political pundits, politicians, and military leaders are becoming increasingly concerned about the significant developments being witnessed between China, Russia, and (to a lesser degree) Iran, and North Korea’s accelerated and enhanced alliances. It would appear there are some serious “allied commitments” being made, indicating a potential *NEW Axis of Power* coalescing. *But why?*

Could it be a precautionary step to *prepare for war*, due to concerns they have about the United States’ reaction to their

heightened aggressive approach toward these alliances and the *obvious* desire to replace the United States as the world’s leading superpower and reserve currency?

These are relevant questions because over the last few decades China has been making *strides in infiltrating many nations* around the world by a myriad of ways—often using the *ruse* of their “Belts & Roads” program to gain favor with the unsuspecting targeted nation. They will often come prepared to negotiate with large sums of money, using it as a means to cooperate and ingratiate themselves with the hosting

nation—that’s their usual method for infiltrating—especially with poorer nations like in Africa, Southeast Asia, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

They offer to build infrastructure, subsidize mining projects, provide construction equipment and engineering, even educational curriculums to teach the ideologies of their Maoists communistic ways through their *Confucius Institutes*. China uses this “bridge-building friendship” program to spread its language and culture within the hosting nation. The problem is,

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A Ground-Floor Opportunity

By **JEFF FLANICK**

Most people at one time or another have dreamed of becoming a millionaire. I remember sitting around my parents’ kitchen table as a child and hearing family members talk about somebody in the news “striking it rich” in business. If I recall correctly, a

McDonald’s franchise was even offered for a reasonable sum to close friends *before* the explosive growth in fast-food restaurants helped catapult the “golden arches” into the financial juggernaut it eventually became. In the more recent past, imagine having opened the first Verizon cellphone store in your area, or perhaps the only Starbucks franchise in your town! Being early,

on the cutting edge of a new “industry” or consumer trend, has the potential to pay huge dividends. Being in the *right* place at the *right* time within the world of franchising has an element of chance involved. No matter how much research one may exert in determining which franchise may become the “next big thing,” in the end, there are

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Can We Discern Who is and Who is not a REAL CHRISTIAN?

By **MIKE JAMES**

What can we learn from Scripture as to who will be in the first resurrection?

Let me admit right from the start I can’t be sure of who God will raise from death to meet Him in the air at His Second Coming. Could there be Christians there who were not part of the Church of God movement? I’m sure there could be, especially when we realize the Church of God movement is only about 200 years old. I can’t answer that question; it is up to God to determine. But we can look at Scripture to help us determine how God determines if someone is truly following Him or not.

But before we look at God’s Word on that, let’s make sure we understand that sincere people can be sincerely deceived. There are several scriptures that make this point. We have all read **Revelation 12:9** and know that Satan has deceived everyone in the world at one time or another. **Matthew 24:5, 24** makes it clear there will be false Christs and false prophets coming who will deceive **many**. Obviously, people who believe in Christ could be doing it incorrectly. The god of this world can blind our minds to truth (**2 Corinthians 4:4**).

Does it matter if we observe holidays or holy days? Does it matter if we keep Sunday for the Sabbath? Do we live on in a conscious state after death or not? Are people in heaven or hell right now? There is one truth my friends. God is not about confusion.

Some will argue that all that matters is your relationship with Christ, but how do you determine what a proper relationship with Christ is? The only answer I can give to that is the Bible provides the blueprint.

Many Christians today believe you are a Christian if you believe that Jesus lived and died for us and rose from the dead. Scriptures that are cited for this idea are **Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 2:2, and John 3:16**. Now let me be clear—I agree with these scriptures, but what does it mean to believe in someone or something?

Well think about it from this

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RUMORS OF WAR

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once they set themselves up and gain your trust, they begin to mobilize and interfere with the social structure. This can result in the hosting nation becoming marginalized! They can often lose control in certain areas of their retail, commercial, and industrial base, leaving China in charge, skimming off profits and becoming embedded into the hegemony of the targeted country. And it's finally becoming extremely clear they are *working an agenda* to conquer the United States and other NATO countries!

The Chinese Agenda

The United States is now beginning to realize it is “facing off” with the Chinese Dragon. It finally has grown into a formidable competitor on almost all fronts of industry, trade, investment, and technology. Recently, we have seen enormous advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and social mediums like Tic-Toc that are designed to collect user data for support to their AI programs. Interestingly enough, the amount of Chinese owned and/or operated western corporations is astounding. Companies you would think are all American are actually owned, operated, or heavily influenced or controlled, fully or partially, by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Consider these few: GE Appliance Subsidiary is now owned by Haier, based in Qingdao China (ref.: republicanworld.com; CNET); GM recently reached an agreement with Shanghai Automotive that they will be taking *controlling interest* of General Motors (ref.: *Motor-Trend Magazine*); also, IBM has sold off their PC business and *integrated manufacturing* with Lenovo in Hong Kong to supply PCs through IBM's existing network of distribution (ref: Lenovo press release); and WH Group, based in Hong Kong is a publicly owned Chinese company that owns Smithfield Foods (ref.: Market Realist & Forbes).

And there are many more American Companies that are subjected to Chinese controlling interests and integrated in some way, or influenced by, “preferred” Chinese “guidance rules,” like the movie industry out of Hollywood. And recently, *Fortune Magazine* reports the *Global Fortune 500* is now more Chinese than American by more than 50 percent. This is a stunning realization when considering the size and scope of growth and influence that's been *stealthily* built without



Chinese immigrants at the US border

much attention—*until now!*

And what's even more disturbing, China is now being recognized as having the largest navy in the world and is one of the reasons they're accelerating their military presence in the South China Sea. Their intent has become obvious: *it's just a matter of time before Taiwan is invaded* as was Hong Kong.

However, “if” or “when” this happens, the United States will be in a very precarious position, both militarily as well as technologically. Keep in mind, the USA imports about \$85 billion of materials from Taiwan, which also plays a big part in the availability of microchips for all sorts of devices sold and manufactured in the United States.

So, clearly, the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), controlled by the (CCP), have made it plain: Taiwan is viewed as a Province of China and Xi Jinping has said, “Reunification with Taiwan is critical to China's national rejuvenation.”

So it would appear the CCP's *long-term intention* is unification with Taiwan—it's just a question of when (ref.: *The Diplomat*, “Why Taiwan Matters to the USA”!)

This is all part of China's 100-year plan to defeat the United States. And much of this strategy is exposed in what three preeminent Chinese military experts claimed about new technologies that would successfully overpower a greater, more powerful nation by a smaller one. It is called the “*Assassin's Mace*.”

Embedded in Chinese folklore, essentially, it outlines how a smaller, weaker combatant could subdue a larger combatant. Three particular weapons were outlined: 1) Electromagnetic Pulse bombs; 2) Tactical Laser Weapons; and 3) Computer Viruses. This is what China has been working toward, hoping to achieve a “quantum leap” in military capabilities thereby, outpacing

western weaponry, before it can be matched. And sadly, that is exactly what the USA has been doing over the last 4 to 5 decades—*helping China achieve this! How? By pushing the USA toward “full cooperation,” while compromising with China* in many areas of technology, manufacturing, and military “know how” (ref.: *New York Post*, “China's Secret Plan to Topple the US” by Larry Getlen; and the book, *100-Year Marathon* by: Michael Pillsbury).

And now, recently, the American people are being told that about 200 Chinese men between the ages of 18 and about 35 or 40 years old are *illegally crossing the USA's southern border every day* in pods of about a dozen or so (ref.: NTD, article by Kevin Hogan, with Michael Yon interview). Additionally, spy operations under the guise of Chinese police stations have been set up in half a dozen cities across the United States. What do you think this is all about? Is this some kind of “writing on the wall”? Doesn't it seem that some kind of stage-setting or *clandestine invasion* for some type of future event *might* be underway? What do you think?

Clearly, whatever is in play, the United States is seriously at risk because the present *border policy* of the current US President *is not sustainable*. Instead, it is existential—and if not changed soon, the United States will collapse as Rome did! And when (not if) that happens the world's conditions and circumstances will be *painfully and dramatically* changed, *setting the stage* for the events of Revelation 13 to emerge.

So What Should Christians Prepare For?

Last month (April 2023), Taiwan detected eight Chinese warships and over 40 jet fighters around the island and 29 of those crossing into Taiwanese territory (ref.: *News-World*,

data from AFP 4-8-23). The CCP continues to intimidate Taiwan militarily, undermining that part of the world's stability.

It certainly appears there is growing *plausibility* that something far more significant could ignite into something between the USA and China, assuming of course that China aggressively moves in on Taiwan, or perhaps South Korea—or maybe both. But, as it was during the Cold War days of the Cuban missile crisis, so it *seems* a similar event *might potentially emerge*. The result of this happening would hold the world hostage between two nuclear powers facing off with each other. *Let's hope and pray this DOESN'T happen!*

However, in these uncertain times and with *rumors of war* increasing, we need to draw near to God and KNOW and ACCEPT the fact: “You shall hear of wars and commotions,

be not terrified [*to fly away, to fall, fail, scare, or be frightened*]; for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by [*soon, at once, immediately, shortly*]. Then said he unto them, Nations shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Luke 21:9–10). He continues describing earthquakes, famines, and pestilences, as well as fearful signs from heaven among the things to occur—but encourages His followers to *be not afraid, fearful, or scared of these things!*

For many decades God's Church has been warning the people of the Birthrighted nations and the rest of the world, troubles and calamities are coming due to the extreme *satanic evil* and the humanistic and neo-pagan ways humanity has engaged in by warmongering and living to satisfy our lascivious selfish appetites of the flesh!

So it should be no surprise to any of us that at some point *accountability* would arrive. And *if* this is that time, then—as it was in the days of Ezekiel, when Judah was invaded by Babylon—we should **not allow** our faith to be “rattled” by what we see, or what may become of our country. Realize, it is no different than when it was during Ezekiel's time. Notice what he experienced and how God describes Judah. Unfortunately, it's a close parallel to our own day and age!

“You are become guilty in your blood that you have shed [consider our crime rates]; and have defiled yourself in your idols [your materialism] which you have made....

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therefore have I made you a reproach unto the heathen and a mocking to all countries” (Ezekiel 22:4).

Yes, today the United States has become a mockery of a nation once considered honorable, trustworthy, globally respected, and God fearing—but not today! Our leaders have become laughable, corrupt, compromised, and in some cases very evil; involving themselves in enormous malfeasance, graft, and extortion. This has embarrassed the USA, insulted their allies, making the United States appear totally *incapable and untrustworthy* of providing the leadership to the world it once did.

Notice again: “...in the midst of you have they [our leaders] dealt by deceit with the stranger [pay-for-play]: in you have they vexed the fatherless [child trafficking] and the widow” (Ezekiel 22:7). “Son of man, the *house of Israel* is to me become dross [backsliders]” (22:18). “There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof.... they have devoured souls [misguided and confused the people]...taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated my law and profaned my holy things...have hid their eyes from my sabbaths [ignored them], and I am profaned among them [they have become shamefully godless]. Her princes [the leadership] in the midst thereof are like wolves ravaging the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls [kill, or sell them into human trafficking/slavery], to get dishonest gain” (Ezekiel 22:25–27).

What a poignant description of our social condition and character of our leaders, be they prophets, priests, or princes, on how they deal with the foreigner, the fatherless, widows, and godly things. As a nation we have insulted and shamed our God and allies!

Ezekiel continues; “And her prophets have daubed them

with untempered mortar [gummy slime, like plaster, weak and runny], seeing vanity [it’s all about them], and divining lies unto them [for self-benefit and virtue signaling], saying, Thus says the Lord GOD, when the LORD has not spoken [they lie to the people]. The people of the land have used deceit and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy; yes, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully” (22:28–29). Corruption, blackmail, and extortion are the by-words of today’s leaders!

Sadly, this is not unlike what our country is presently. There are many similarities we can overlay onto our business leaders, politicians, lawyers and judges, entertainers, pundits, and so-called ministers, evangelists, and alleged prophets—so many have taken advantage of the weak, young, and needy. As a people claiming to be a Christian nation, we have shirked and recoiled from our responsibilities to reflect the Hebrew God, our Father, and His first-born Son, Jesus Christ!

And so it is, like 2,500 years ago, today God calls out among His people and asks; “And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me FOR THE LAND [the nation] that should not destroy it [in our case, the USA]: but I found NONE” (Ezekiel 22:30).

So what should we (Christians) prepare for? “Gird up your loins” and *prepare to stand in the gap!* We cannot afford to be like those of Judah 2,500 years ago. There is trouble up ahead for the United States and, frankly, all of North America! We have *lost control of our borders* due to the *complicity of the US government* subsidizing human trafficking, while *actively continuing to increase our unsustainable debt*, which our enemies have noticed and are now *challenging* the USA’s world reserve currency status, which, if successful, will financially collapse the nation. However,



Chinese military parade

this is nothing new—Rome found themselves in the same predicament.

Christians, worldwide, need to prepare for some hard times due to this global storm we are in. As I’m writing, it appears the USA has recently agreed to send a few nuclear submarines into the South Korean waters. The present threats and “rumors of war” encompassing the world are indeed *real and dangerous!* The weaponry some nations have in their arsenal can, in less than an hour, change our way of life for decades to come—just ask those in Ukraine!

Interestingly, today’s Heraldry portrays the United States Eagle in route for a collision with a *healthy Chinese Dragon* allied with a *Russian Bear*. They’re allied companions (Iran and N. Korea) just intensify the fuel to the *resistant force* they represent against the United States. We see the global *outgrowth of increased suspicion and distrust* toward the USA, because of US perfidy among many nations, caused by US government’s “alphabet agencies” deploying the treachery of the “*Industrial Military Complex Black Ops*.” This loss of respect and trust throughout the world will only cause more nations to look for alternative methods of resolution, and China’s present position is becoming more attractive as a viable option as the United States’ global influence continues its decline!

What “Possibility” Could We Be Looking At?

In Leviticus 26 we are warned about blessings and curses. The curses would be a direct result from not following God’s laws and statutes. His warnings are stated from verses 14–45. But notice how some of these curses are described and claim will occur to any culture adopting the God of Israel as their God.

Terror and consumption, a burning ague, and pestilence that cause sorrow of heart will be allowed to occur. Obviously, this is talking about diseases. We would sow our seed in vain and our enemies will eat it. Our strength would be spent in vain and the land would not yield what it could. We would eat but not be satisfied. This seems to allude to shortages, perhaps famine, and financial waste and debt, preventing the land not to maximize its production, falling short of its actual capability due to mismanagement. There will be fear among the people causing them to run when none is in pursuit, because the US lost pride in its power.

Throughout the narrative we are warned about highways and cities becoming desolate and wasted. An invader will come against us to conquer with the sword, bringing the nation to its knees. Those who are left alive will be scattered into the lands of the enemy, remaining powerless as refugees, with fearfulness and faintness of heart, while some ultimately perish in the lands of those enemies.

This is not a very encouraging “likeness” of the United States as a conquered country from enemies outside of its borders and those treasonous within its own leadership. Deuteronomy 28 puts additional light on the fate of those nations carrying the Birthright that have generated a culture described in Ezekiel 23 as the story of Aholah and Aholibah. Needless to say, *God is not amused!*

In Deuteronomy 28:15–68 explains similar curses as described in Leviticus 26.

Disease, famine, and pestilence; foreign nationalists would gain prominence within our gates and become the heads of the nation, while the rest of the country becomes the tail. The nation would be cursed in the city, and in the field; the people would betray each other, turning against one another to the degree of resorting to cannibalism, as shocking as that may seem.

We must remember, as a Christian nation we carry an enormous responsibility to the God of Israel, especially since the United State, as is the many nations associated with the United Kingdom, are beneficiaries, the recipients, of the Birthright promise/blessings passed down from Abraham to Isaac, then to Jacob, and finally to Joseph and his sons (Genesis 48:18–22).

So, in these times of *rumors of war* that are *potentially* frightening and perilous, we are told; “When you see a cloud rise to the west, straightway you say, There comes a shower; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, there will be heat; and it comes to pass. You hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that you do not discern this time” (Luke 12:54–56)? Be brave, be bold, and courageous, and learn to *embrace the time*; and don’t draw back (Hebrews 10:37–39)!

So, don’t be afraid of the things we *may be* about to see! **Why?** Because, “If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31–39). Keep this *firmly in mind and memorize these scriptures* as we walk deeper into the storm that surrounds us!



Chinese military

REAL CHRISTIAN

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perspective: if you truly love someone, do you act on your love? Do you do things for the other person in your relationship? I'm sure you do, as I'm about to run to the grocery store to pick up something my wife has asked me to buy. I drove my daughter to school this morning and will pick her up this afternoon for the same reason. Love is not just a feeling or emotion; it is action for the other.

Now let me be clear—you can't earn your salvation. It's a gift from God by grace through faith, and we will address that a little later. But I want to be clear; belief involves actions and not just thoughts.

So, when we say we believe in God, we would all agree we love God too. If we love God we obviously should be living our lives to show God our love. How do we show our love for God? Well, there are many other scriptures that can help us with that besides the ones cited above. I don't think any evangelicals would disagree that if we confess and believe in Jesus we should also repent and be baptized (**Acts 2:38**).

Well, what about **Acts 24:14**, which tells us Christians should also believe everything that is written in the Law and the Prophets? Or how about **1 Timothy 3:16**, which tells us all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, and instruction in righteousness. The writer only had the Old Testament Scriptures in mind when he wrote this because the New Testament had not been written yet. Now we might find some disagreement with our other Christian friends.

We need to remember one or two scriptures do not make a doctrine. We need to be aware of all the relevant scriptures that deal with an issue to better understand how we should view something.

So let us see more scriptures, like **Luke 6:46**. If we truly believe in Jesus Christ we need to follow through by doing what He tells us to do which is only found in the Bible.

Now keeping God's law will not save us because we can't keep it perfectly. But do we make the law void? Of course not; it exposes sin for us and helps us determine what not to do. Read **Romans 3**, which brings these points home.

Keeping this in mind let us look at **Romans 8:9, 14**. Here we read if we don't have God's Spirit, we are not really Christians. Now how can we be sure we have God's Spirit? Well, some would argue if you

bore spiritual fruit you have God's Spirit. The spiritual fruit is described in **Galatians 5:22–23**. It includes love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But once again, is that the only proof of God's Holy Spirit in you? I could argue many good people in history have exemplified these characteristics and they did not have God's Holy Spirit. Men like Mahatma Gandhi and the Dali Lama have had these characteristics, as have many others who believe in false religions.

Another interesting area of Scripture referring to fruit is **Matthew 7:15–23**. Notice here that false prophets will be known by their fruits also. What kind of fruits will false prophets manifest? We don't get a clear description till we look at verses 22–23. It seems some who claim Christ as their Lord will not enter into the Kingdom because they do iniquity. Also note that **Matthew 7:21** states we must do the will of the Father to enter the Kingdom.

In **Acts 20:29–30** we also read about wolves like the false prophets in **Matthew 7**. The actions of the wolves in Acts are to teach perverse things and to draw away believers in Christ to false doctrine. Obviously doctrine matters to God.

Let's not forget that **2 Corinthians 11:13–15** tells us some "ministers of God" are actually working for Satan. It would seem, from **Acts 20**, that it may have something to do with what they are teaching.

So, if it is about who has the Holy Spirit, what else does the Bible reveal to us about how you might know if you have it. Well, over in **Acts 5:32** we read that God gives His Holy Spirit to those who are obedient to Him. Now put that scripture together with **John 14:15**: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Are you starting to see a bit of a pattern now?

Let's move over to **1 John 2:6** and see that if we abide in the true God we ought to walk or live as He lived. Moving back to **John 15:10** now, we see Christ is reiterating the need to keep the commandments of God if you truly love God. I could offer several similar scriptures, but I think you get the idea.

But let's get to the crux of the matter now. In **John 4:23–24** we read we must worship God in Spirit and in truth. So obviously if you are a Christian, you have God's Spirit and it helps you worship God, but what about the truth? Just what is the truth? We can probably get into a debate about that, but how about the

biblical definition.

The Bible tells us, in **John 17:17–19**, that God's Word is truth. Now I believe that to be true, so when I try to define what a Christian is I need to keep all that truth in mind and not just some of it. God also tells us His Spirit will help us understand His truth (**John 14:25–26; 2 Timothy 2:15**). Now that presents a problem because Christians don't all believe the same thing.

We believe in observing the Sabbath, Holy Days, God's law; we don't believe we are conscious in death; and so on. Does what you believe as doctrine matter in determining if you are a Christian or not? Well, I guess it does when you look at Scripture.

Now I know no one group has all the truth or understands all Scripture completely. But I think most of you would agree that on major doctrines like the state of the dead, the nature of God, the Kingdom of God, heaven and hell, the nature of man, God's law, worship days, and much more there is a big gap between what the Church of God movement believes and what mainline Christianity believes.

If God gives us His Spirit and the Spirit helps reveal the truth of God and His Word to us, why do the mainline churches have so much error in their major doctrines?

Oh sure, I hear the critics out there telling me everyone in the Church of God is not necessarily showing the fruits of the Spirit. I get that. I also get that everyone in the Church of God is not guaranteed being in the first resurrection. But I'd like to hear from those of you who believe mainline Christians are guaranteed the first resurrection if they sincerely believe in Christ; how you resolve that when you look at the information I'm citing in this article.

Notice in **Luke 24:32** the disciples realize Christ (resurrected) has opened up the Scriptures to them. Obviously the Spirit of God in Christ was amongst them opening up the truth of the Scriptures for them. Later in this chapter (**Luke 24:49**) Jesus tells them to wait for the promise of the Father in Jerusalem. This promise was the Holy Spirit which would come upon them on the Day of Pentecost and help them know and expound upon God's Scriptures.

Truth matters to God. There are no different truths. We either have an immortal soul or we do not. God is either a Trinity or He is not.

Let's go back to Scripture to try and pull out some more points on this subject. In **John 6: 44, 65** we read that God must draw you toward Him. Is God drawing everyone toward

Him since the coming of Christ? I don't think so. More are being drawn now than in other phases of human history, but I still believe it is a small minority. Why do I say this?

Notice some interesting scriptures. In **John 2:23–25** we read that many believe in Jesus due to the miracles they saw Him perform. You would think He would follow up with these people and really work on them to completely follow Him. But notice what is written here: "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because He knew all men" (**verse 24**). In other words, Jesus knew mankind enough to know that everyone was not going to totally commit to Him. Remember the parable of the Sower (**Matthew 13; Mark 4**).

Another similar scripture is found in **John 12:42–43**. Here we see others believe Christ is the real deal, but due to fear they don't completely commit either. Belonging to Christ is more than just believing in Christ.

In **Acts 8** we read the story of Simon the Sorcerer trying to buy access to God's Holy Spirit. Simon was wanting the Spirit because he saw it as a source of power. Peter let him know that his heart was not right to receive God's Spirit.

We learn something important from this incident in our discussion on this topic. Not everyone who wants access to God will receive it. Your intentions and "heart" must be right also.

Another example of this can be found in **Acts 15**. Notice **verse 5**, where we read about the sect of the Pharisees who believed in Christ, but they had ideas that were not correct. The rest of the chapter makes it clear that the ideas of the sect of the Pharisees did not win out. In other words, people can believe in Christ and hold to false doctrines. How God judges that is up to Him, but my point is believers in Christ can have false ideas, and I believe God would want those false ideas to be changed.

Let's address something else to think about in this discussion. Christianity is the largest religion in the world with over 2.3 billion adherents. Do we believe all these people will be in the first resurrection? Well, based on what we have already addressed, I would think not. But there is more data in the Bible to support my opinion.

In **Matthew 7:13–14** we read about FEW finding the way to salvation. It also tells us that many will take the path to destruction. Now I believe the "few" mentioned here are people getting into the resurrection when Christ returns

the second time. I believe the many on the path to destruction refers to the vast majority, who will be in the second resurrection, which is a resurrection of judgment that can lead to the second death. I believe many of those people will not face the second death because they repent and follow God when they have their opportunity.

But my point in raising this scripture is that not many people are truly obedient to God if we are judging from what the Bible tells us. In **Luke 12:32** this concept is reiterated. Christians are called "the little flock" which solidifies the idea not many will enter the Kingdom at Christ's Second Coming.

One other important scripture to note (among others) is found in **Matthew 13**. Notice first in **verse 2** Jesus is speaking to a multitude of people. He tells a story in **verses 3–9**, and His disciples ask Him in **verse 10** why He speaks in parables. The answer Jesus gives is shocking to many people. He basically says these other people (most people) just won't understand what He is going to explain to His disciples. This scripture is quoting from **Isaiah 6:9–11**. Isaiah seems to provide a timeframe when the masses will begin to understand, and that will be after a great reckoning takes place.

Think back now through biblical history. God has always been working through a small minority of people. In the book of Genesis there are not many people who walked with God. In early history (**Genesis 5**) it seems like Enoch was alone in walking with God.

God then destroys the earth and everyone in it except for Noah and his family.

God then chooses another man and his family (Abraham) to begin to work with. This leads to the nation of Israel, but most Israelites in their history did not walk with God.

When Jesus comes on the scene He chooses 12 disciples, not 30 or 100, just 12. Now since that time God's plan has expanded the possibilities for others to join in, but Scripture, in my opinion, makes it clear a vast amount will not be in that first resurrection.

Some of you may not agree with my opinion and that is fine. Let's look at some points that could be made against my opinion.

Ephesians 2:8–9 could be used to argue that grace is given to anyone who believes and has faith in Christ; that it is not about our obedience or works. This is true, but many people fail to read the next verse (**10**), which says despite the fact we are not saved by

our works, a true Christian will perform good works! And what works has God before ordained that we should walk in? Obviously that would include God's law.

Let us not forget **James 2:14-19**, which makes it clear faith without works is a dead faith. Abraham is the father of the faithful, not because he "just believed," but because he showed God his faith by almost sacrificing his son. Christ showed His faith by living a sinless life. **Hebrews 11** makes it clear faith leads to action. We must follow their example.

I have heard **1 Corinthians 12** used to explain why there are so many different denominations in Christianity. In other words, there are differences among Christians, but we are all one body. I would have to disagree with using

this chapter in that way. When this chapter was written there was not the variety of Christian experience in the first century world as there is today. There were not major disagreements in doctrine back then like there is today.

Another scripture that is used is **John 10:16**. The idea here is some feel Jesus was saying He is working with people we may not be aware of, so don't judge other denominations and what they believe. If they believe in Christ they are Christian. Once again, the context matters with this scripture. Many commentaries suggest the meaning of this scripture pertains to the fact that Gentiles had not been true followers of Christ. God was only working with Israel. Christ would begin to address this in the later stages of His ministry

and especially when He rose from the dead. The original context of this is not about other denominations, but Christ now bringing the Gentiles into His one fold.

Another scripture that is used to argue God will bring in anyone who believes in Christ in the first resurrection is **Matthew 5:19**. The reasoning here is, it seems this scripture is saying there will be people in God's Kingdom who teach against God's commandments. In other words they made it into the Kingdom despite this. So, if someone taught Sunday was okay as your Sabbath, that is okay because this scripture would seem to indicate that.

I must disagree with this assessment. First of all, let's get the full context of this chapter. Just a few verses before (**verses 17-18**) Jesus is

telling us the law still matters. Then beginning in **verse 21** till the end of this chapter Jesus explains a better understanding of a number of Old Testament laws. He is not doing away with the law but promoting it.

So how can we look at **verse 19**? Well think about this. Will there not be flesh and blood human beings still on earth when Christ's Kingdom reign begins? Yes, and won't some of them still be carnal and able to sin? Yes, and we even read in **Zechariah 14:18** of a possible example of this disobedience where Egyptians will be punished if they don't keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Could this not be an example of being least in the Kingdom due to possible disobedience?

Some will bring up the story of the thief on the cross (**Luke 23:39-43**) to argue God is not

concerned with obedience, just a repentant heart. But it sounds like the thief had a real awakening in his final moments. He may have changed his mind during the process of his incarceration and now punishment. Jesus, being God, would obviously know this man's true intent (**John 2:23-25**). Obviously, God can save whomever He wants whenever He wants, but the record of Scripture also tells us we need to be obedient.

Listen, far be it from me to know who is or is not a real Christian. But I'm hearing more and more people in the Church of God movement speaking about Christianity and limiting the importance of proper doctrine. I think doctrine matters and we need to hold onto it and continue to walk as Jesus walked.

Applying Bloom's Taxonomy to Christianity

By ARNIE FONTAINE

What in the world am I writing about now? Flowers? Taxes? No. "Bloom's Taxonomy" is



about a flow of development of the mind. In the 1950s Doctor Benjamin Bloom devised a pyramid of cognitive development. It had six levels with the foundational level being Knowledge which was then changed to remembering. Next came comprehension which was changed to understanding. Thirdly was application. Next on the upward growth was analysis or analyzing. The fifth level was listed as synthesis changed to evaluating and moved to the sixth position. The sixth originally was evaluation and was moved to the fifth position.

In this document I will attempt to illustrate how this pyramid can be used to understand our Christian growth and development. It was part of my list of tools back in my teaching days to draw out the full potential of my little kiddos in class. Bloom's intent was to help educators teach their kids, but in this context Christians take it upon themselves to go through that process.

It can be daunting at times. The 1960s were a rather troubling period in our history. Many in education downplayed the importance of remembering facts. This created problems with the development of students without a firm foundation in level one.

The book of Deuteronomy

illustrates the first level in that it calls Israel to remember the foundational things as they head into the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 6:5-9 states: "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart. And you shall diligently teach them to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the posts of your house and on your gates."

Here we have an example of recalling previously learned material Israel was given some forty years earlier in the book of Exodus. Going over something over and over builds that knowledge base. That is why daily Bible study plays such a vital role.

In Joshua 1:8 we read: "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate therein day and night, so that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it, for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success."

So, with that in mind, let us look at the Third Commandment: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

The first step would be being able to recite it from memory. Simple enough?

Well next we go to under-

standing that knowledge. So, we wouldn't use God's name without regard of its importance. In anger or hurt we should not vulgarize God's name.

Next up would be application. We know the commandment; we understand what it means, but next we need to apply it in our lives. What does it look like in action? We must each day take on the Mind of God to not use His Name disrespectfully. It goes even deeper in that if we call ourselves Christians and do not present ourselves, by our actions, as Christ-driven disciples, we have broken the spirit of the Third Commandment.

James, the brother of Christ, writes about the applying/doing principle:

"Therefore, having rid yourselves of all filthiness and all the abounding of wickedness around you, then in meekness accept for yourselves the implanted Word, which is able to save your lives. Then be doers of the Word, and not only hearers, deceiving your own selves, because if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, this one is like a man considering his natural face in a mirror, who, after looking at himself, went away and immediately forgot what he was like. But the one who has looked into the perfect law of freedom, and has continued in it, this one himself has not become a forgetful hearer, but is a doer of the work. This one shall be blessed in his actions" (James 1:21-25).

The implanted Word? Now isn't that interesting? He is saying the Word of God has been internalized and understood, levels one and two, and now it's time to act on it.

Maybe Dr. Bloom read his Bible?! And don't forget to reinforce the basics. Chapter 2 continues the theme. James has a big hammer as he nails down the point. Further, chapter 4, verses 16-17, pounds it home. Words are great in saying "the right things," but James exhorts to put those words into action.

In Leviticus 18:3-5, we read: "As they do in the land of Egypt where you dwelt, you shall not do. And you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Neither shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall do My judgments and keep My ordinances, and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live in them. I am the LORD."

We are to stay true to God's instruction in this walk and not copy the world's ways.

These three levels are the basics, but levels 4-6 go deeper, much deeper.

Next in our upward progression is analysis. In this process we take a given concept or idea and separate it to study its structure to better understand how it works. Looking at all the parts and how they fit together is our goal. Jesus came in part to bring a deeper meaning to the law, more than just a simple application, which is important, but there is more. Matthew illustrates this deeper approach in chapters 5-7. Paul understood this. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul lays out a division of thought. May I suggest that the fourth level is equivalent to spiritually discerning from this point forward. Mankind can, by simply doing the first three, lead a

rather successful physical life, but to move beyond we need God's Holy Spirit to rightly divide God's Word.

Please read this in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Diligently study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of the truth."

Notice the expression "rightly divide." In the workaday world you might be trouble-shooting a piece of equipment using logical deduction. Another aspect might be digging into an idea to find fallacies that defy logic—looking for all the ins and outs of a matter. It doesn't take much to see in the world of Christianity a lack of this type of discernment.

We need to look beyond that letter and see the deeper meaning. The term rightly divide means to cut a straight path to travel. In our biblical context, we would then teach the truth directly upon this deeper study and, might I add, correctly. The pages of the Bible may be flat but there is depth of meaning in each book.

The Way mentioned in Scripture is a straight road to a specified goal. It means a road or path.

So what about the Third Commandment? I alluded to this earlier, but let's look at Paul's writing to the Galatians in chapter 3 and verses 26-27: "Because you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ."

Are our lives deeply affected by the Holy Spirit? Do we do

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BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

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everything with the knowledge of its presence in our lives analyzing our thoughts and subsequent actions daily? I am speaking of self-analysis, something we do prior to every Passover season—something that should be ongoing, in fact. We represent Christ by our example every day.

Paul, in Romans 2:24, nails it: “For through you the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles, exactly as it is written.” We do not want to be the “you.”

Okay, let's move to number five, and that is to evaluate/judge ideas and concepts. The purpose, in the end, is to find a solution. Is something right or wrong? Does it have merit? Can we make righteous judgments? If you are reading a Bible commentary, can you discern what is correct and what is error? In Paul's travels we see an example of this principle in Acts 17. We know the story well.

“Then the brethren immediately sent away by night to Berea both Paul and Silas, who, when they arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the Word with all readiness of mind and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (verses 10–11).

Trust and verify. They were motivated to not just believe anything but to pass judgment by comparing the spoken word with the Scriptures. Nowadays it is the Bible in the lap or table syndrome verifying. They wanted to base their theology on the Word of God, not their or others' opinions.

Ephesians 4:14 states, “So that we no longer be children, tossed and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men in cunning craftiness, with a view to the systematizing of the error.”

Moving on to the last and highest level, we come to creating, which entails building a

structure, putting parts together. In the world that might entail designing a machine to do a specific task or tasks. This level applies to us individually and collectively. We become a new creation, going beyond just knowledge and judgment.

Let us begin with Peter in 1 Peter 2:1–2: “Therefore, having put away all wickedness, and all deceit, and hypocrisies and jealousies, and all slanders, as newborn babes, yearn after the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow.”

Yes, grow to the consuming of meat, as Paul writes in Hebrews.

Continuing in Ephesians chapter 4, we see in verse 16: “From Whom all the body, fitly framed and compacted together by that which every joint supplies, according to its inner working in the measure of each individual part, is making the increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Paul takes us from level five to six, going back to verse 14.

He clearly sees the upward growth and recreation of our physical existence to our spiritual lives. Notice the theme continues in verse 23:

“And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which according to God is created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (verses 23–24).

The goal, as we've learned, repeatedly is to take on the Mind of Christ.

Paul's perspective is very instructive in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live. Indeed, it is no longer I; but Christ lives in me. For the life that I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith, that very faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

In Matthew we read that clothing and wineskins can illustrate the spiritual necessity of a new creation:

“Now no one sews a new piece of cloth onto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill up the hole takes away from the garment, and a worse

tear develops. Neither do they put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins will burst, and the wine will spill out, and the wineskins will be destroyed; but they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved together” (Matthew 9:16–17).

Continuing in Ephesians chapter 2: “You are being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone in Whom all the building, being conjointly fitted together, is increasing into a holy temple in the Lord; in Whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (verses 20–22).

Bloom categorized an educational process of developing the mind back in 1956, but the formula has existed since Creation and before. God's plan was to bring a new type of creation into the God Family which needed a physical existence to develop a spiritual mind capable of taking on enormous responsibility and trust. Are you on board?

OPPORTUNITY

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no *sure things*. Franchise failure rates are significantly high. According to the Franchise Brokers Association: “Studies in the market have estimated that failure rates for franchises can be as high as 50%, while others studies show lower rates around 20%.”

Another way individuals have gained significant wealth is through business start-ups. Think of some of today's big money technology behemoths: Microsoft, Apple, and Google to name just a few. Concerning the founding of Microsoft, the website Sybershel.com had this to say, “With only \$1,500, the two [Bill Gates and Paul Allen] developed a basic version of the BASIC programming language, which they then sold to a local electronics store. This gave them enough funds to rent an office space where their ideas and innovation flourished.” The website for the Library of Congress Research Guides states, “Apple Computer, Inc. was founded on April 1, 1976, by college dropouts Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, who... started out building the Apple I in Jobs' garage and sold them without a monitor, keyboard, or casing.”

In 1998, with the help of an investor, Larry Page and Sergey Brin officially started Google when they moved from their dorms at Stanford to begin work in a home's garage in Menlo Park, California.

Like all new business ventures, these

industry giants had humble beginnings. These company founders had to invest a tremendous amount of their time, talent and energy into their business projects for them to eventually become successful. This was not without a cost to their personal lives. Countless stories of the personal sacrifices involved in starting a business can be found with the click of a mouse on the internet. As noted above regarding franchises, there are no guarantees of success when starting a personal business, no matter how well intentioned, or thought out the enterprise plan is. Hard work and dogged perseverance do not automatically ensure a business will flourish either. Investopedia says: “Data from the BLS [Bureau of Labor Statistics] shows that approximately 20% of new businesses fail during the first two years of being open, 45% during the first five years, and 65% during the first 10 years. Only 25% of new businesses make it to 15 years or more.”

You may be thinking to yourself, is this some type of business promotion in a church newspaper? Isn't money the root of all evil? No. This article is not about business opportunities and financial wealth. And, no, money itself is not the root of all evil. “For the *love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:10). My intention here is to contrast the opportunities of a business start-up with our opportunities, as



potential firstfruits, in the Kingdom of God.

A person may have an exceptional business plan, great employees, and a fabulous product, and be *in a prime location*; yet, there is no assurance the business will thrive with absolute certainty. Unlike the potential rewards we may reap from starting a business, the rewards promised by God are guaranteed (if we keep our end of the bargain). In this life, striving to invest in the opportunities God offers us through His Son, should be paramount.

Christ our Messiah tells us in John 5:28–29, “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned” (NIV quoted throughout). We see here our actions (those who have *done good*) will yield the fruit of *eternal life*. Later in the Gospel of John we read the following: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:27–30).

Those who hear Christ, and follow His example in obedience to the Commandments are rewarded with eternal life. It is not a “maybe” promise, nor a conditional promise,

such as, if things go “just right” with my business, it will pay off. This is secure assurance to all those called in this present age: *if* you do the “work” you *will* surely profit from it. The letter to the Hebrews elucidates the certainty of God's promises. Hebrews 6:17–20 states: “Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Even if one is blessed with a flourishing business and great wealth, it is important to remember Christ's teaching in Matthew regarding wealth: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19–21).

Returning to the concept of a ground-floor opportunity, the implication is, early participants will have distinct advantages over others coming in at a later time. In business it usually



means being among the first people to be given such an opportunity. Many times, it involves being one of the first employees at a relatively small company; or it could also involve a brand, stock, or product that few others have yet to discover. Early partakers in such a scenario within a start-up typically get more stock options at a significantly lower price than eventual fair market value as the business expands. How does this translate into our spiritual reward with the Almighty?

First Corinthians chapter fifteen, known as the resurrection chapter, lists the order of resurrections; and it confirms there indeed is a resurrection of the “firstfruits” (those who were called and chosen in this present age). Our Messiah tells us in **Luke 14:13–14**: “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” His message is clear; doing good works now will result in a great reward later.

We see that by earnestly attempting to live in accordance to Torah and God’s Word, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we have an opportunity at life everlasting thanks to the Sacrifice of

our Messiah. Not only that, we have a “ground floor opportunity” for an even greater reward, by having a chance to participate in the first resurrection! **Revelation 20:6** states: “Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.” Concerning the resurrection in the last days, the Prophet Daniel states: “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (**Daniel 12:3**). The exact manifestation of what it means to “shine like the brightness of the heavens...for ever and ever” may be unclear to our human minds, yet it certainly sounds desirable! The apostle Paul, in the letter to the Romans, says: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed” (**Romans 8:18–19**).

As shown in the business examples cited at the beginning of this article, hard work and great dedication are indeed necessary if one hopes to turn a



business idea into a successful enterprise. In like fashion, we must exert concerted effort towards our spiritual enterprise if we wish to participate in God’s future Kingdom reign. “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (**Revelation 5:10**).

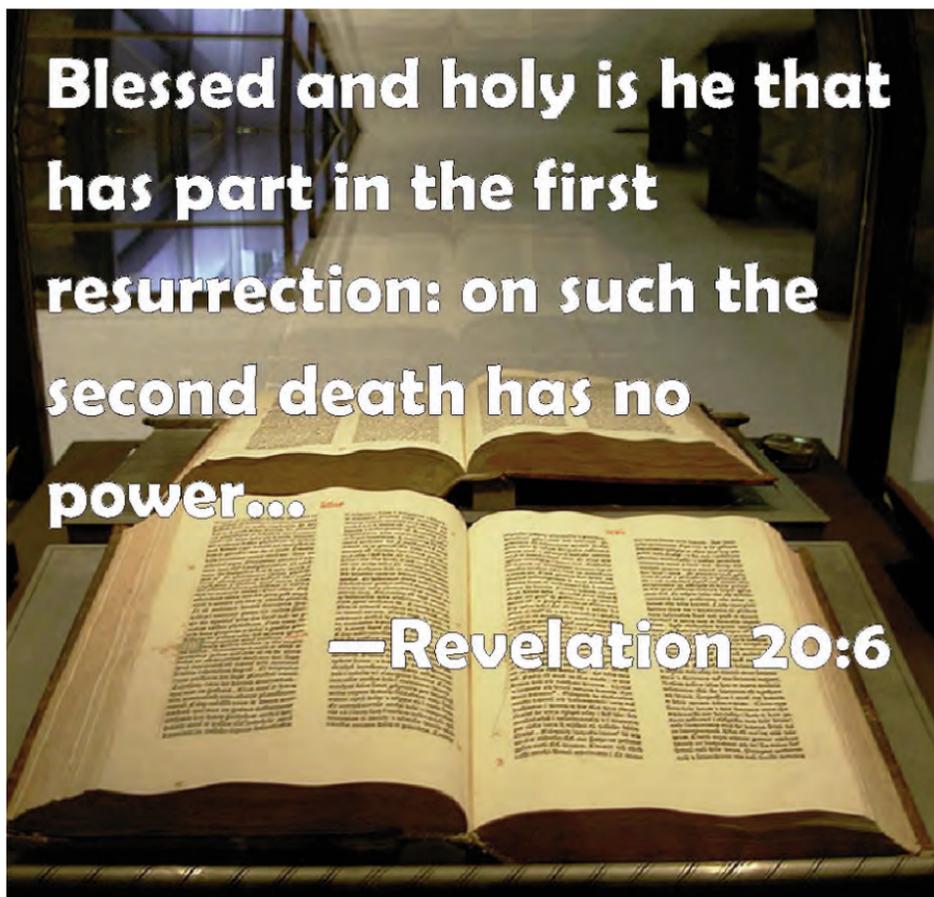
We should perform good works in this life to show appreciation for the salvation opportunity given to us freely through Christ. If we are accounted worthy to participate in the Millennial Kingdom, we will have work to do in that day as well. Christ and Our Father are workers! “In his defense Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working’” (**John 5:17**).

We should be mindful of *The Parable of the Ten Minas* contained in Luke 19. This parable describes a noble man who, upon leaving to be appointed king, gave various servants a portion of wealth to invest until he returned. This parable is a metaphor for Christ going to the Father, and returning as King of Kings and Lord or Lords at His Second Coming. At that time, He will reward His servants, those who were called in this age, according to the work they performed during their lifetimes. This work includes the spreading the gospel and bringing others to the knowledge of the truth of God. In the story, servants produced varying levels of returns on the king’s wealth; and they were rewarded accordingly, based upon their results. In our “ground floor opportunity,” we should strive to be

like the servant who produced ten minas. “Well done, my good servant!” his master replied. “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities” (**Luke 19:17**). Unfortunately, one servant failed to produce for the king. This servant lost what he had, and it was given to the servant who produced the most. We should take the lesson of this parable to heart. God has given us such a grand opportunity to participate in His wonderful Kingdom to come, the Kingdom described in chapter two of Daniel that will fill the whole earth. “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever” (**Daniel 2:44**). As Christ says in **Revelation 22:12**, “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.”

(The title of this article was inspired by a statement made by Adrian Davis during an online Wednesday night Bible study. You can access these Bible studies via Burlington Canada’s Rumble channel at <https://rumble.com/c/c-1359686>. Archived Bible studies can be found online at <https://lineuponline.thinkific.com/>).

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A Lesson in Longsuffering

By MICHELLE ALGARRA



The Bible teaches us to strive hard to live at peace with everyone. Sometimes a Christian grumbles and argues over hardships that come with trying to have a harmonious relationship with others; grumbles and complains over persecutions, offenses, mockery, and ridicule or other negative comments one may receive from others. If we learn to pray to God regarding this personal hardship, we may ask the Lord to give us a spirit of mercy and compassion, striving hard to be tolerant of the foibles of

other human beings. No matter how hard we try, we simply cannot please everyone. We can never measure up to human beings’ standards of perfection. The irony of it all is that no one measures up to any of these faulty human standards in the first place.

We all grow up believing certain normative standards of behaviour, physical deportment, personality differentials, etc., based on the specific culture we were brought up in. Because we all have a need to feel important, our personal values are measured based on society’s standards in terms of educational qualifications, employment, physical appearance, material well-being, and even popular religious persuasions. It’s not really

possible to shake off personal idiosyncrasies and normative standards, but we can at least strive hard to be nice to everyone, including those we do not agree with, or are disagreeable, and those who may not deserve our respect, not just those who respect us. We can also strive hard to be nice to people who we feel are inferior to us in whatever societal standard. This might mean we must learn to demean ourselves to a certain extent, by affecting an attitude of humility. Humility in this regard means to esteem other people better than us, even if deep inside we feel as if we are better than these people, spiritually and otherwise. We must overcome our personal failings, not try to change others or force people to

keep up with our personal standards of human righteousness.

Actually, we all bear grudges and we all have to bring along our personal baggage. Since we cannot change our past or the manner by which we were brought up by parents and other guardians, as Christians it is our responsibility to just try to make the most of the situation, knowing God is the judge of all and ultimate government. His standards based on the Bible are what count and not the standards of this world. If we learn to appreciate the manifold blessings God has granted us as individuals, and try not to be selfish but more other-oriented, we will learn to be

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LONGSUFFERING*Continued from previous page*

at peace with ourselves and others instead of constantly grumbling and complaining about not measuring up to human society's standards of perfection and importance, and grumbling and

complaining about other people's inability to meet those standards themselves.

We can only expect absolute mercy and compassion and understanding from God the Father and our elder Brother Jesus Christ. Since they are God, they have knowledge and understanding of our minds and inner feel-

ings. If we learn to elevate our thoughts to the God realm, rather than carnal society with demonic influences, we can expect God to provide us with the peace which surpasses all understanding. All human beings, even the most evil ones, also do good deeds, because of the dictates of human con-

science. Probably even Hitler and Mussolini did some good deeds. Judas, no matter the evil he committed, did experience remorse over his wrongdoing, betraying the Son of God. Ultimately, only God can judge humans as individuals, and can judge the Church as the body of Christ.

The Value of God

By **GEORGE ROPER**



Things we deem to be valuable and things we deem to be worthless are considerations that we make on an ongoing basis. The true worth of an asset can be misevaluated. Doing so can have

the unfortunate outcome of putting one at risk of great personal loss. Determining an accurate appraisal for any good or service can involve various approaches. One means by which value is ascribed is per the cost of labor involved in producing a given product. Value is also shaped by the availability or scarcity of an item. An additional means by which value can be rated is according to the need of said item or service to the user. While yet another approach to assigning value involves how much an individual is willing to expend to access a good. When examining these variables, we find that value may not always be universally recognized and can be subjective.

What is highly regarded to be of worth by one can be viewed in a dissimilar manner by another. Whether that distinction is reflected as another individual or one hailing from another generation, value can indeed be viewed differently. An example of this can be seen in the art of Vincent Van Gogh. Van Gogh was a Dutch painter from the late 1800s who resided in Europe. He was a proverbial struggling artist and was commercially unsuccessful. Deemed a failure, Van Gogh lived in poverty and was supported by family. He produced approximately 2,000 pieces of work over his lifetime. Van Gogh once said of his lack of appeal and success, "I can't change the fact that my paintings don't sell. But the time will come when people will recognize that they are worth more than the value of the paints used in the picture." Decades after his death, Van Gogh's works came to gain notoriety. Today, his paintings command great sums. In 1990, a Van Gogh piece, the *Portrait of Dr. Paul Gachet*, painted in 1890, sold for \$83 million. The majority of his works are now displayed at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. This illustration shows how one generation, in Van Gogh's contemporaries, did not see his art to be of any great significance. Yet, future art aficionados have embraced his paintings as valuable works.

A further case showing the disparity in how value is recognized points to the tales told in the pages of *Superman*. The character of Superman was introduced in a comic book which was first published in 1938. The publi-

cation was an initial success. Presenting strong sales, the book sold at 10¢ retail, garnering 2.5¢ profit per book for the publisher, while costing even less to print. The remaining comic book issues of *Superman* from the late 1930s in prime condition are rare. As such, in 2022, an early issue of *Superman* published in 1939, with a cover price of 10¢, sold for \$5.3 million, far exceeding the 10¢ price that any 1939 consumer would have been willing to pay.

In yet another instance of how value can be unrecognized is seen in how man relates to God. Throughout man's history, mankind has not valued God's overtures to relate to him.

In Christ's conversation with the Samaritan woman, she professed herself to be religious by inquiring which protocols pertaining to location of worship should be recognized. As well as acknowledging that further clarity was expected to be provided when the Messiah appeared.

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:19-24, NIV used throughout except as noted).

Christ informed the Samaritan woman that her religious expression was formed using preestablished sources that she was exposed to, that were already in error. He explained that her approach to worship required an additional component of a spiritual nature that would enable her to properly connect with God. When this spiritual component is possessed and coupled with accurate information concerning proper worship, then she could have access to God.

It is important to note, in following the narrative of Christ's exchange with the Samaritan woman, even though he is not stated to have performed any overt miracles in their presence, the Samaritans valued Christ's message based on his words alone. Whereas the Jews did not express the same value for Christ's message and continuously pressed for more miracles as substantive proof of his legitimacy.

The opportunity that has been afforded to mankind to engage God

through a spiritual mechanism, coinciding with factual instruction about God, is what is to be valued. That accommodation to worship God in spirit and truth has been produced and made available at a cost of labor that has been valued at a great price (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). That price was the very life of the God who created all things and who later became a man (John 1:1-3, 10-14).

The God that divested himself of divinity and became mortal (Philippians 2:6-8) did so to correct an impediment that developed which has separated man from God (Isaiah 59:2). God had established a code of conduct by which all individuals should behave. When a person falls short of behaving according to that code of conduct, it is referred to as sin (1 John 3:4). The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). To God's dismay, all mankind has sinned (Romans 3:23). Humanity has found themselves to be in the predicament, of being separated from God as a result of our sins and having to pay a penalty of death for those transgressions. To correct this problem, God became a man and lived a sinless life as a human being (1 Peter 2:21-22; 2 Corinthians 5:21), whereby making His life eligible to pay that penalty of death for every individual and remove the obstruction that has separated man from God (1 John 3:5; Romans 5:8).

Paul speaks of the effort and labor that went into making this service available.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Romans 5:8-11).

The value of these prospects that God has afforded to us is enormous. It entailed the very life of the creator of the universe to facilitate and address a monumental need that every human being has. To have the penalty of death over us removed. With these efforts, individuals can have a relationship with God, be relieved of personally paying the penalty of death themselves and now look forward to a prospect of eternal life. The apostle John's report verifies these privileges.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not

send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).

In spite of these desperately needed amenities, one would think that the value attributed to having a relationship with God would be highly recognized and appreciated. However, mankind has habitually failed to recognize the value in God's provisions. In the book of Zechariah, the prophet, as God's agent, expresses his wish to be compensated for the provisions that had been extended to them. He instructed them to remit payment according to what they deemed his services had been worth.

"And I said to them, 'If you like, give me my wages, whatever I am worth; but only if you want to.' So they counted out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'—this magnificent sum at which they valued me! So I took the thirty coins and threw them to the potter in the Temple of the LORD" (Zechariah 11:12-13, New Living Translation).

In response, the Jews whom the prophet was speaking to determined that, in their evaluation, all that God had contributed to them was only worth a paltry 30 pieces of silver, which was equivalent to the price of a slave (Exodus 21:32). Their low appraisal was an affront, showing how the people did not value God's benevolence.

Christ also illustrated how many fail to recognize the value of God extending Himself to humanity.

Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet'" (Luke 14:16-24).

In Christ's analogy, the invitees showed contempt for the affair they were called to be a part of. They didn't

value their invitation, which is analogous of individuals who fail to see the value in building a relationship with God. Many may not recognize the worth of being responsive to God but

there are those that do. God commends those that respond to his calling and pursue him wholeheartedly (Matthew 1:44–46). Just as the works of Van Gogh or the 10¢ copy of a *Superman*

comic book initially appeared to be of little worth, those items later revealed themselves to be extraordinarily valuable. Likewise, having a relationship with God will prove to be the most

valuable thing that any human being could ever have. Let us then make the most of our time today in being responsive to Him and seizing the value of God.

Questions & Answers

by Vance A. Stinson

The Third Angel's Message and Eternal Torment

QUESTION: Revelation 14:9–11: “Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.’” Doesn’t this Bible passage prove that those who go to hell will be tormented forever?

H.H., sent by e-mail

ANSWER: The book of Revelation frequently uses Old Testament language and imagery to describe divine judgment upon ungodly men and nations. In this case, the passage draws from Isaiah’s description of the desolation of Edom.

Remember that the visions of the book of Revelation, like many of the writings of the prophets, are rich in symbolism, so we need to avoid reading such texts in a wooden literal sense. Revelation 14:9–11 echoes Isaiah 34:9–10, which is a prophecy against the kingdom of Edom. We’re told that Edom’s “land will become burning pitch” and “will not be quenched night or day,” that “its smoke will go up forever,” and that “from generation to generation it will be desolate; none will pass through it forever and ever.” This is a way of describing complete and utter destruction, not continuous smoke and flames. Edom did not literally become burning pitch; nor has its smoke continued to go up throughout the ages. The worshipers of the beast and his image, then, will not literally be tormented endlessly with fire and brimstone, but will be permanently destroyed.

The Unpardonable Sin in the Book of Hebrews

QUESTION: I just wanted to say, in reference to your article [on the “unpardonable sin”], that the thrust of Hebrews, in a nutshell, is to those who were contemplating returning to temple worship. There remained “no more sacrifice” applies to committing the sin of denying Christ in that manner. Also if you would please note that according to Ephesians we are sealed in Christ. I’ve not seen a scripture about being “unsealed.” I understand a confession of Christ is one thing, but continuing a life of sin reveals a serious heart problem. If one’s heart has been truly changed, continuing a life of sin is the last thing the truly converted wants to do. Thank you.

ANSWER: The book of Hebrews was written during a time when tensions between the believing community and Judaism were extremely high. Because of the intense pressures generated by the situation, some believing Jews were tempted to return to Judaism, but under those circumstances a return to Judaism would apparently mean publicly renouncing the Christian faith. So, yes, I would agree that the writer of Hebrews has in view those who were contemplating returning to temple worship. However, since Jewish believers continued worshipping at the temple until

they were driven out, there is nothing wrong with worshipping God at the temple. The temple, after all, was intended to be a “house of prayer for all nations.” The writer of the epistle, then, has in mind a kind of “returning to Jewish religious practice” that involves a renunciation of faith in Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Perhaps a public renunciation of Christ was required. In any case, I would say that renouncing Christ is the last thing the truly converted wants to do.

The writer of the epistle was not addressing people who were drawn to the gospel but not yet converted. The people who were tempted to cave to the pressures were believers, not just individuals who were in some measure attracted to Christianity and maybe close to actually accepting Christ as Savior. No, they were truly converted believers—partakers of the Spirit, the same Spirit that seals the believer for the day of redemption. It is entirely possible for the “sealed” to come to a place in their lives where they might choose to walk away from the salvation God had so graciously given to them. The “sealing of the Spirit” is clearly conditional, for it is clear that believers can “grieve” and even “insult” the Spirit of grace.

You write, “If one’s heart has been truly changed, continuing a life of sin is the last thing the truly converted wants to do.” That’s true! But the truly changed believer is still capable of sinning, as I’m sure you will admit. God does not want us to sin, but we can still do it, can’t we? If you could sin once, could you sin twice? What about three times? Four? Five? The answer is yes—a believer is capable of committing sins. So why would anyone think that sinful behavior could not, over time, become a pattern of behavior—habitual to the point that the believer becomes calloused? That can happen. It is possible, then, that a believer can walk away from his faith, return to his former ways, and end up with his name blotted out of the book of life. We cannot earn our salvation, but we can “earn” our condemnation. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.”

The Primordial and End-Time Expulsion of Satan

QUESTION: Watched “Has Satan Been Cast Down to Earth?” ... on YouTube. [The speaker] said Satan hasn’t been cast down? I don’t understand this. Will you comment on this?

J.D. (sent by email)

ANSWER: The speaker is not talking about the primordial casting down (or fall) of Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12; Ezekiel 28:16), but of the casting down of the dragon (Satan) described in Revelation 12:7–12, which occurs at the end of the age. Notice that in the latter the devil is very angry “because he knows that his time is short” (verse 12), meaning that he knows that he will soon be bound and prevented from deceiving the nations and continuing his war on the saints. This obviously pertains to a period shortly preceding the Second Coming of Christ.

It should be remembered that John is describing a vision. He sees these things happening in the sky (meaning of “heaven”). The sign involving a woman, dragon, and male child is said to have “appeared in heaven” (12:1)—that is, in the sky (from John’s perspective). The war Michael and his angels wage with the dragon and his angels also takes place “in heaven [the sky]” (v 7). The vision is made up of symbolic elements. The dragon (Satan) and his angels are defeated and thrown down to the earth. This does not necessarily mean that Satan is actually in heaven (i.e., near the Throne of God); it’s just that John sees the war taking place in the sky and the dragon being defeated and thrown down to the earth, where he aggressively goes after the rest of the woman’s children (the saints, true Christians) because he knows he doesn’t have much time left before Christ comes. Portions of the vision may echo the primordial fall of Lucifer, but the vision itself refers to the devil’s wrath being unleashed in the time preceding the Second

Coming of Christ.

Praying to Jesus

QUESTION: We are instructed to pray to the Father in Jesus’ name. In this way we build a relationship with the Father. There is no instruction to pray to Jesus, so how does one build a personal relationship with Jesus?

B.M. (sent by email)

ANSWER: There is no specific instruction for praying directly to Jesus; however, when we pray “in Jesus’ name,” we are, in effect, asking Jesus to intercede for us as we make our needs known to the Father. We are praying both *to* and *with* Jesus, for He, as the Mediator between God and man, is both God and man.

The lack of *instructions* on praying directly to Jesus should not cause us to ignore or minimize the importance of New Testament *examples* of praying to Him. The following passages are sufficient to establish a precedent for praying to Jesus:

- Acts 7:59–60. Stephen calls on Jesus right after seeing Him standing at the right hand of God.
- 1 Corinthians 1:2. Paul affirms that Christians “in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- 2 Corinthians 12:8. Paul plead with “the Lord”—almost certainly a reference to Christ—regarding the “thorn” in his flesh.
- Revelation 20:20. The book of Revelation is meant to motivate Christians to pray, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

The Son is ontologically equal to the Father and therefore worthy of our worship, so how could we *not* address Him directly in our prayers? Prayer, after all, is a key component of worship.

I think the lack of instruction on praying to Jesus is due to the fact that the early church took praying to Him for granted. He was believed to be at the right hand of the Father and, with the Father, the Source of grace and peace (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; etc.). This was foundational and fundamental to the “faith once for all delivered,” so I don’t think any of the apostles or early disciples thought that any prayer, whether public or private, was addressed exclusively to the Father (i.e., to the Father without inclusion of the Son), even if the prayer began with “Our Father in heaven.” As Jesus said, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father,” and “I and the Father are one” (see John 14:7–11; 10:30; 5:23). It is impossible to build a relationship with the Father without building a relationship with the Son.

Family Life in the Kingdom

QUESTION: In the Millennium, whoever survives the horrors before Christ comes back will still be fleshly humans, men, women, children, families who will live and be taught God’s ways for one thousand years. Once people are all turned into these “spirit beings” ... they would have no gender? So I would no longer have my husband because we would all be neither male nor female? Though God and Jesus are male beings? There will no longer be kids or families because no reproduction if all spirit beings. No animals to enjoy. Doesn’t sound like a happy place to me.

L. (sent by email)

ANSWER: I see no reason to think that God’s everlasting family won’t include sons and daughters. There will surely be a continuity between our present and future identities, just as Jesus’ pre- and post-resurrection identity was continuous. The fact that we will no longer require reproduction for perpetuation of the species doesn’t necessarily mean that gender identifications will change.

God is not a male or female or combination of the two. The biblical descriptions of God as a male (with “He,” “Him,” “His” pronouns) are anthropomorphic.

Continued next page

God is wholly other than the material universe and anything in it, though certain features of humanity in some ways reflect aspects of the divine nature and the relationship between Creator and creation.

Family life may be different from our present experience, but I see no reason to think that our loved ones today won't still be our loved ones then but without the limitations of mortal human life as we know it today. Today, we grow old, get sick, and die. The children fortunate enough to grow to adulthood will, sooner or later, grow old and die. Their parents die. Their siblings die. And on it goes. From the formation of the family till the death of its last member, many events take place. Some are wonderfully joyous; others are terribly tragic. That's life—it's just the way it is. You're thinking only of the happy part, but the other part is just as real and certain as the happy part of family life.

In the Family of God, there won't be any tragic events. No more dying. No more final goodbyes. No more suffering or watching loved-ones suffer as their lives dwindle away. No having a police officer show up at your front door to report that your beautiful daughter was killed in an automobile accident.

Marriage itself is only until the end of mortal life. Suppose a woman's husband dies and she remarries. Let's say that she and her first husband had two children, and that she has two more by her second husband. How will that work out if she, her four children, and both husbands are in the resurrection at Christ's coming? She will be married to neither man, for she and both her former husbands will recognize that marriage belonged to the previous existence and has no place in the new, permanent community. As the Pulpit Commentary says, "Marriage is an earthly relationship, and can have no place in a spiritual condition. All that is of the earth, all that is carnal and gross, all human passions, all that is connected with sin and corruption, shall pass away. The risen life is no mere reproduction of the present, but a regeneration, new life added to the old, with new powers, acting under new laws, ranged in a new community."

We don't know *exactly* what it will be like once we "put on immortality," but we do know that the joy of life in the Family of God will greatly exceed anything we have experienced here.

Eternal Punishment

QUESTION: So, it's your opinion that Christ when speaking of "Eternal Punishment," **He meant that animals and insects, fish and fowl, get eternal punishment too. Is that correct? Are you aware of the explicit teachings of Christ that said, "Moses and the Prophets" taught the immortality of the soul immediately after death?** Why didn't you all be honest and say that "eternal punishment" meant annihilation, like squashing a bug? Because, you all are afraid to be honest, that's why....

C.S. (sent by email)

ANSWER: Animals don't get any kind of punishment from God, let alone eternal punishment. When one animal tears into another and makes a meal of him or leaves him maimed and in pain, that's not punishment. Suffering, no matter how intense or enduring, in the animal kingdom is not punishment of any kind. Neither is death, regardless whether it is painless or is preceded by prolonged intense pain.

If you think we all are "afraid to be honest," I suppose you think the growing number of Bible-believing Evangelicals who are abandoning traditional beliefs on death and hell and embracing the same view we hold are also "afraid to be honest."

Do you think the fires of hell are literal? Or do you agree with the many Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant believers who say that the "fire" is metaphorical and is the condition caused by the sinners' own rejection of God? Do you believe that "hell" is, as C.S. Lewis says, "a door locked from the inside," and that the only reason its inhabitants are in it is because they refuse to open to the One who stands at the door and knocks? Tell me, since you apparently believe in some kind of horrendously painful eternal fire that keeps the wicked in absolute misery for eternity, do you think the Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical/Protestant believers who hold the views described above are dishonest? Was

C.S. Lewis dishonest?

Where, precisely, does Jesus state that Moses and the prophets "taught the immortality of the soul [and conscious existence] immediately after death"? Are you referring to what Jesus said to the Sadducees when they attempted to challenge Him on the resurrection (Matthew 22:23–33)? If so, notice that Jesus said nothing about the intermediate state (the state of the individual soul between death and resurrection); the subject was the *resurrection* of the dead. When the Sadducees presented their case against the resurrection, Jesus replied, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For *in the resurrection* [not "in the intermediate state"] they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven. But *concerning the resurrection of the dead* [not "concerning the intermediate state"], have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

You may be taking that statement to mean that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not dead, but are still alive in the intermediate state. But Jesus unambiguously connected the "living" state of the fathers with "the resurrection of the dead." He means that when God said to Moses, "I **am** the God of Abraham... Isaac... Jacob" (instead of "I **was** the God of..."), God was speaking proleptically—that is, His speech anticipated the future, when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would live again and receive the promises to the fullest extent (Hebrews 11:13–16, 39–40).

(For a full study on death, the afterlife, and hell, request a free copy of our booklets, *Hell, You Say?* and *Immortality: God's Gift to the Saints.*)

Many Called, Few Chosen

QUESTION: What is the difference between the called and the chosen?

L. (sent by email)

ANSWER: At the conclusion of the Parable of the Wedding Feast (see Matthew 22:1–14), Jesus said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (verse 14). The "calling" is the *invitation* that goes out by way of the preaching of the gospel. Everyone who gets the invitation (i.e., everyone who hears the gospel message) is "called"—hence, *many* are called. However, of all those who are called, a relative *few* will respond to the invitation and conform to the conditions required (symbolized by the proper wedding garments). Those who do are the "chosen" (the elect). The "chosen," then, are those who choose to say "Yes" to the invitation. This shows that election is *conditional*; only those who accept the invitation and dress appropriately for the wedding (those who believe, repent, and resolve to obey God fully) are counted as the elect.

In summary, the difference between the "called" and the "chosen" is this: All who have heard the gospel have been called (invited). But the only ones counted as the chosen (the elect) are those who appropriately answer the call. Therefore all the chosen are called, and of all those who are called only those who appropriately answer the call are the chosen.

Humans and Angels

QUESTION: So I guess I want to know, if God wants a "human" family or a "spirit being" family, in the end of it all. And if He wants a "spirit" family, does He not already have that in His Angels?

L. (sent by email)

ANSWER: The angels are ministers to the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Through the Incarnation, God became one of us, not an angel (2:5, 9, 16–18). He came to us as one of us, and in so doing He deifies humanity. Christ is, not was, the New Adam, the deified New Humanity (1 Corinthians 15:45–49). When we are joined to Him in faith, we become a part of the New Humanity. Ultimately, our defective mortal bodies will be transformed into the likeness of His glorious body, and only then will we experience the fullness of the deified New Humanity (Philippians 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2; 2 Peter 1:4; Romans 8:9–17; Galatians 4:5–7; John 17:21–23).

Christ came to redeem humans and make it possible for them to enter God's everlasting family. We can

only speculate about the future role of the holy angels, but I would say that whatever God has in store for them, it must be glorious.

Sunday Observance and the Mark of the Beast

QUESTION: I am a French Canadian, and I am writing to you about your sermon entitled "Will the Real Beast Please Stand Up?" You are right when you say the beast is the Roman Empire, and at the end-time it will consist of ten nations (Daniel 2:41; 7:7, 24). You said the mark of the beast WAS NOT the Sunday worship. Daniel 7:8; Apocalypse 13:11–18; 12:16. Woman means church. Apocalypse 16:18. The mark with the Catholic Church they will put in force is the Sunday observance, a mark (a sign) indicating you accept its authority. You can't buy and work on Sunday, and if you "Judaize" on the Saturday you will be put to death.... The Sabbath day is a sign between God and His people. Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 20:12, 20; Exodus 31:13. Nothing personal. On the topic you can consult the Seventh-Day Adventists....

D.C. (sent by email)

ANSWER: Thanks for writing and expressing your views. I looked up the sermon you reference and listened to a portion of it, since I did not remember dogmatically stating that "the mark of the beast WAS NOT the Sunday worship." Indeed, I did not dogmatically deny that the mark of the beast was the enforcement of a Sunday law; instead, I expressed *my personal view* that the "mark of the beast" was not necessarily a visible, external mark or sign, but could be simply a symbolic way of describing those who give their allegiance to the beast. I stated that this was my opinion and admitted that I could be wrong.

In my opinion, the "Sunday law" view is speculative at best. Believe me, I have studied the best arguments Adventist scholars have been able to produce, but I still find the view highly doubtful.

In the message you refer to, I pointed out that the mark of the beast (which is identified with the name/number that is in the right hand and forehead of the beast's followers) is contrasted with the name of Father and of the Lamb written in the foreheads of the Lamb's followers (see 14:1ff). *That*—the name of the Father and the Lamb—is, in this passage, the mark (sign, seal) identifying God's people, so it is doubtful that the contrasting sign, or mark, would be a Sunday law. Those with God's "sign" are simply those who have submitted their lives to the reign of God/Christ; and those with the beast's sign, or "mark," are those who have submitted their wills to the will of the beast. If you give your allegiance to *any* of Satan's agents, you will face the same dreadful fate (unless you repent), with or without any visible sign, such as a tattoo, a special card, an implanted chip, or observance of Sunday instead of the Sabbath.

The seven-headed beast from the sea and two-horned beast (the false prophet) appeared in the first century AD. The two beasts represent a system that persecutes the true people of God, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus. Manifestations of these two beasts have appeared down through the centuries, and a final manifestation will emerge prior to the Second Coming of Christ. Keep an open mind; we might be surprised as to what form that manifestation takes. It doesn't necessarily have to be an end-time European confederation in league with the papacy. It could take a different form. It doesn't matter, for as long as you keep the names of God and the Lamb in your forehead (i.e., as long as your loyalty is to them), you won't submit to the spiritually destructive demands of any Antichrist power.

Baptism in the Name of Jesus

QUESTION: I see that you use the verse Acts 2:38 in reference to water baptism. So do you use the singular Name of Jesus in baptism instead of the titles of Matthew 28:19? This is a sincere question. Thank you!

N.D.A. (sent by email)

ANSWER: All baptisms are done in the name of Jesus Christ. This means that they are done by His authority, since He is the One who commands the baptism of repentant believers. Baptisms are "*into* [*eis*, not *en*] the name of the Father...Son...Spirit" (Matthew

28:19). To be baptized into the name of something is to be baptized into whatever is named. So one is baptized *into* the Father, Son, and Spirit. To be baptized “into Christ” is to enter fellowship with both Father and Son (1 John 1:3; cf. Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27), and our fellowship with Father and Son (and each other) is in the Spirit, for all believers are joined by one and the same Spirit.

When I baptize someone, I usually say, “I baptize you *into* the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and I do so *in* the name of, which is by the authorization of, Jesus Christ.” The baptism, then, is in the singular name of Jesus Christ, though mention is made of the relationship one is entering into through baptism.

The ‘Remnant of Her Seed’

QUESTION: Please take another look at something which occurred to me...regarding the following scripture.... “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17). We may be reading it incorrectly. Why are the remnant persecuted and not protected if they are keeping God’s commandments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (which is Prophecy)? The COGs believe it says they are indeed keeping such. Perhaps the correct reading should therefore be: “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” The SEED are the ones who keep the commandments and have the Testimony of Jesus Christ, not the REMNANT. The remnant are lukewarm, they do NOT keep the commandments nor do they have the Testimony of Jesus Christ! They have lost all of that and no longer teach those things. That’s why they have to go through the tribulation. Try reading it that way, Sir. It seems to make a lot more sense that way.

ANSWER: The expression “remnant of her seed” should be understood the same way you would understand me if I were to say, “I’m glad to hear your firstborn child is doing well, but what about the *rest of your children*—how are they?” Christ (the “male child,” 12:5) is the firstborn “seed of the woman,” and true Christians are the “rest of her seed,” or “rest of her children.”

The “woman” is the ideal Zion, the mother of the “male child.” The “male child” (Christ), then, is the woman’s “Seed,” or “Offspring.” The serpent goes after Him as soon as He is born, but He is ultimately “caught up to God and to His throne.” After being cast down, the serpent goes after the woman but is prevented from destroying her. Knowing his time is short, he goes after “the rest of her offspring”—her other children, the brothers and sisters of the original Offspring, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the teachings of Jesus.

The “rest of her offspring” are “her other children,” the “male child” (Christ) being the first. This can be nothing other than the true church—the people of God—those who faithfully keep God’s commandments and hold to the teachings of Jesus. The woman is the mother of them all—the ideal Zion, the “church in the wilderness,” the righteous “remnant of Israel” to whom the Messiah was born. She and her children are identified with each other the same way “Jerusalem” and her “children” are identified with each other.

The Devil cannot destroy the woman—i.e., the ideal Zion, or “Mount Zion” of Hebrews 12:22ff, which consists of all God’s people, past and present—but he and the principalities and powers associated with him have worked in the hearts of wicked men to bring horrendous persecution and suffering to millions of God’s people down through the ages. The apostolic church suffered such persecution, and the notion that the end-time church will not do so is based on a deeply flawed way of interpreting Revelation 12 and a few other passages. God will protect His own from *His* wrath upon the ungodly, but it is clear that His people will be persecuted, even killed, by Antichrist forces right down to the time when Christ

appears in the heavens.

Revelation 13 continues the story of the Devil’s wrath against the “rest of her offspring.” It tells of his two chief agents—the two beasts, one from the sea, the other from the earth—also known as “the beast and the false prophet,” who will be “allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them” (verse 7). These persecuted people are not spiritually weak, lukewarm, compromising, in-name-only Christians; they’re the **saints**—the *holy ones*—who, like the multitudes of faithful martyrs before them, refuse to “bow the knee to Baal” or in any other way cave-in to the Antichrist forces.

All Things to All Men

QUESTION: I would like to reach out to any available minister to help me explain 1 Corinthians 9:19–22. Thanks and God bless.

S.B. (sent by email)

ANSWER: Let’s examine the passage: “For though I am free from all” (verse 19a): This refers back to verse 1, where Paul asks, “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle,” etc., and then goes on to explain, “This is my defense to those who would examine me” (verse 3). Paul is “free” in that he, as others, exercised freedom in his own behavior. “Freedom” to disobey God’s law is not in view here. Rather, what is in view is Paul’s willingness to lay aside his freedoms for the sake of the gospel. This becomes evident in the next verses:

“I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them” (verse 19b). Paul’s opponents were criticizing his behavior (see verse 3, quoted above), claiming he was being inconsistent, for he behaved one way with one group and a different way with another group. Paul explains that he’s merely recognizing the cultural sensitivities of the people he is trying to reach with the gospel:

“To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law [see Acts 21 for an example of this]. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law [these were the Gentiles, the uncircumcised, who were regarded as “outside the law” since their ancestors were not at Mount Sinai and did not receive the Torah]. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings” (verses 20–23).

When Paul was among Gentiles, he lived like them—that is, without the man-made cultural distinctives of the Jews—but he makes it clear that he was *never* free to disobey God’s law. When he was among observant Jews, he lived as they did, and was even willing to conform to ceremonial regulations (Acts 21) he did not regard as essential to believers.

So in this whole section, Paul is saying that a believer has to be willing to set aside his self-interests for the sake of achieving the goal God has set before him—hence the athletics metaphors of verses 24–27. Christ had made Paul an apostle—one of the foundational pillars of the Church He promised to build (Matthew 16:18; Acts 9). His commission was to “carry [Christ’s] name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). So when Paul carried Christ’s name before these groups, he behaved in a manner that would be deemed appropriate by his audience, though never in a manner inconsistent with God’s law.

The Eighth Day of the Feast

QUESTION: Please comment on [the meaning of the Eighth Day of the Feast].

J.D. (sent by email)

ANSWER: The “eighth day” is the day after the seventh. The number seven is the number of completion. The “eighth day,” then, represents a new beginning, as the seventh day brought completion to an old era. I’ve been saying this for years in my Last Great Day sermons, but I have also talked about the White Throne Judgment on that day—both in the same ser-

mon. I’ll explain later, but first, let’s understand why some folks, recognizing what I’ve said here to be true, have argued that the Eighth Day does *not* picture the White Throne Judgment. Their argument goes something like this:

If the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles pictures the millennial reign, then the Eighth Day, being the day after the seventh, points to the New Creation, or New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21:1ff). They argue that the *seventh day* of the Feast of Tabernacles, *not* the Eighth Day (Last Great Day), pictures the White Throne Judgment. For support of this, they point to Jewish tradition, which gives some special significance to the seventh day of the Feast. Citing the tradition, they claim that “the last day, that great day of the feast” (John 7:37) was the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles, not the Eighth Day as we have traditionally believed. Therefore, since it was on the seventh day of the Feast that Jesus cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (verse 37), the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles must picture the White Throne Judgment, when all who never had a true opportunity for salvation will be given that opportunity. If this is so, the Eighth Day would picture the New Heaven and New Earth—the eternal state—not the White Throne Judgment.

One problem with this view is that the Old Testament nowhere assigns any special significance to the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. It’s not a holy day, and there’s nothing in Leviticus 23 or anywhere else in the Torah to suggest that the traditions that appear to have been in place by the time of Jesus were known in the days of Moses. Besides, I don’t think we can be sure that “the last day, that great day of the feast” was the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus’ apparent allusion to the traditional water-pouring ceremony need not necessarily have happened on the last day the ritual was performed. It is entirely possible that Jesus was alluding to the ceremony that had gone on for the previous seven days. In any case, I’m fine with the possibility that the “great day” was the seventh day of the Feast. Further, I have always strongly doubted that Jesus’ statement, “Let all who thirst come to Me,” was an allusion to the White Throne Judgment. He was talking to *those* people, then and there, many of whom would undoubtedly be in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit would be poured out, and who would hear Peter’s inspired preaching.

Another problem with this view is that it attempts to create a hand-in-glove fit between the annual festivals and the prophesied periods/events of God’s unfolding plan for humankind. The festivals provide a *general overview* of God’s plan, but do not give us a detailed picture. In the book of Revelation, we find, in order, the millennial reign, the final rebellion, the White Throne Judgment, and the New Heaven and New Earth. We can only theorize about the precise location of all of these within the prophetic portrait provided by the Feast of Tabernacles and Eighth Day.

Having said all this, here is where I am (and have been for a long time) on these matters:

I will continue doing what I have done in past years. When I bring the sermon on the Eighth Day, I will talk about the White Throne Judgment as not only the time when the “rest of the dead” will be judged and the incorrigibly wicked destroyed in the lake of fire but also the time when humankind (all who are not destroyed in the lake of fire) will “put on immortality,” thus entering the same New Creation that Jesus Christ entered when His mortal body “put on immortality.” *Therefore, the Eighth Day, being the day after the seventh, is the first day of the New Creation for Planet Earth and its inhabitants.*

I see no reason to restrict the meaning of the Eighth Day to one narrow meaning. It points to *both* the White Throne Judgment (when great multitudes will be saved and “put on immortality”) and the New Creation. In fact, the salvation/transformation of the multitudes *will be* the first day of a New Creation!

Some also place the final rebellion described in Revelation 20:7–10 in the White Throne Judgment period (20:11–15). My rejection of that view is explained on pages 6–7 in the “Q&A” section of the Winter 2020 issue (Vol. 41, No. 4) of *The International News*. You can find it on our website (cgi.org). Go to “MENU,” click on “INTERNATIONAL NEWS,” and scroll down to Vol. 41, No. 4.

CHURCH NEWS

CGI-Medina Becomes “Destination Site” for Spring Festival Season



CGI Medina became a “destination site” for this year’s Spring Holy Day Season. From the evening of Passover on Tuesday, April 4, until and through the weekend, on April 9, it seemed it was event after event, keeping everyone busy through the first five days of the Holy Day season.

Brethren converged on Medina, Ohio from as far as Texas and Tennessee to as far north as Nebraska. It turned out that just about 80 folks were in attendance for many of the functions scheduled for the first five days of Passover and Unleavened Bread.

Passover services commenced the events. Bill Watson and John Nicoletti combined in the presentation of the service, which was also shared by Robert Gurinowitsch, David Bezon, and Steven Hendrix reading John 14, 15, and 16 respectively, and Mr. Watson concluding with John 17. It was well attended with over 55 people taking the emblems that night.

The next evening was a real “family affair”! About 80 people attended the Night To Be Much Observed at Olesia’s Tavern’s upper room—yes, that’s right—it, too, was an upper room! Cheryl Gurinowitsch, working with the restaurant’s catering director,

had the room eloquently prepared with beautiful beige table cloths, enhanced with dish place mats, beautiful chandeliers, trimmed with a weathered wooden plank ceiling—it was a gorgeous room, fit for a feast, making it a real “Night To Be Remember”!

The meal was buffet style with two entrees, slow braised beef short ribs, and thyme chicken, with side dishes of mashed potatoes and roasted seasonal vegetables. We provided our own unleavened bread in small baskets and brought our own desserts, which the restaurant prepared for serving.

All in all, it was a wonderful night, commencing with a short cogent presentation given by Mr. Watson, explaining the night and what it was all about. This was followed-up with hours of fellowship and just relaxing with access to a cash bar that was also provided.

On Friday, Mr. Watson and Darren Colins combined their efforts to baptize four people during the afternoon. Mr. Matt Mendez and his wife, Chanse, from Nebraska; and Mr. Frank McAfee and his wife, Athena, from Medina.

There were about 25 people that turned out to witness the event of these new members of Christ’s body make



Four people were baptized on Friday, April 7, with 25 turning out to witness the event and congratulate these new members of Christ’s body.



the commitment into the Family of God. What an inspirational afternoon it was for all who attended.

On Friday night a co-sponsored fellowship event was conducted by a group of independent Sabbath/Holy Day-keepers that reached out for a “get together” to welcome in the Spring Holy Day Season. The following day was the weekly Sabbath, with the message being brought to the congregation by Mr. Watson. This was followed up with another get together at a CGI-Medina member’s home for food, fun, and fellowship for all those in atten-

dance.

As many had mentioned, the days seemed to fly by this year. The services, baptisms, and activities kept everyone occupied and busy, which made the time seem to go rather fast, but it was enjoyable and a lot of fun!

We are now looking forward to Pentecost Weekend! So, consider this your personal invitation to Medina, Ohio for a weekend cookout, fellowship, and services on May 27 and Pentecost Sunday, May 28! Hope to see you there!

Bill Watson

FEAST OF TABERNACLES 2023 Poughkeepsie, New York

The Church of God International is pleased to host the 2023 Feast of Tabernacles in Poughkeepsie, New York. The festival site is located in New York’s Hudson Valley, a region located one hour outside of New York City. Surrounded by picturesque mountains and colorful foliage, the serene setting is the backdrop of this Northeastern fall festival site.

One of the feast activities will be a visit to New York City for a showing of the Tony Award winning Broadway show, *The Lion King*, in Time Square, New York.

This year’s Feast also offers a chartered sunset dinner cruise traversing the scenic Hudson River. Setting sail from New York City, the tour will pass such sites as the Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty and will take in the spectacular evening view of the New York City skyline.

We invite you to join us in New York to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. For more information, visit cginewyork.org/fot.

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WATCH FOR MORE TO COME!

In Loving Memory

Thomas Howard Kauffung

September 3, 1927 – April 14, 2023



Thomas Howard Kauffung of Cincinnati, Ohio was born September 3, 1927 in Hamilton, Ohio and passed away Friday, April 14, 2023 at about 4:30 a.m. He was 95 years old. He had suffered a second broken hip and then a broken leg in the last few months of his life. His family was relieved to let him go to his rest.

He was preceded in death by his parents Nellie (née Harvey) and George Kauffung; wife Barbara Marie Webb Church Kauffung; daughters Phyllis Sizelove and Mary Kauffung; sons Donald and George Kauffung; stepsons James and Jack Church; sisters Virginia Maltby, Mildred Garland, and Florence Tussey; and brothers George and Donald Kauffung.

He is survived by sons Thomas (Cathy) Kauffung and Daniel (Donna) Kauffung; daughter Vivian Rust; grandsons Christopher Sizelove, Paul Kauffung, Mark Kauffung, and Kyle Kauffung; granddaughters Jennifer Sizelove, Rachael Kauffung, Carolyn Shipe, and Jenny Kauffung; great-grandchildren Jacob Shipe, Makayla Kauffung, and Avie Kauffung; stepdaughter Kathy (Doug) Blackburn; step-grandsons Jerrit Blackburn, Matthew Blackburn, Colton Church, and Clayton Church; step-granddaughters Rachelle Church and Amanda Church; and step-great-grandchild Logan Johnson.

Tom was an accomplished athlete in his youth, winning his high school's championship obstacle course race in both his junior and senior years. He was a gymnast on the Hamilton High School tumbling team and also a champion diver. While serving in the Army Air Force from late 1945 until early 1949, he was a featherweight golden gloves boxing champion too. In the Army Air Force, he served as a weatherman and was stationed in the far-away places of Panama, Peru, and Paraguay to help predict weather for the European front. After his mili-

tary service, Tom worked at a Sherwin-Williams paint store briefly before embarking on a 35-year lifelong career at General Electric Aircraft Engines as a Test Engineering Specialist. He studied engineering at University of Cincinnati.

In 1952, he met and married Lydia Simpkins and had a family of 7 children by 1965. Tom and Lydia attended the Worldwide Church of God, and one year won the grand prize at the Feast of Tabernacles talent show for a musical number. Sadly, they were divorced in 1971, and Tom finished raising the children. In 1989, Tom met the love of his life, Barbara Church. They were married for 31 years until her death in 2020.



Tom and Barbara

In 1985, Tom began attending the Church of God International and was ordained as an elder in 1998 at the age of 71. After retirement from General Electric Aircraft Engines, he often joked that he had better make himself useful so God would keep him around. That sure worked. At the age of 80, he took a long anticipated trip to Germany to visit his ancestral homeland and the cities of Hamburg, Berlin, Magdeburg, Halle, Leipzig, Altenburg, Freiberg, and Kaufungen in Germany. While at the Altenburg Castle researching the story of an ancestor, Kunz von Kaufungen, Der Prinzenraub (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kunz_von_Kaufungen), Tom encountered a troupe of actors reenacting the story. As soon as they learned Tom was a direct descendent of the man their play was about, they wanted a picture of Tom with the lead actor and director for the regional news. When he returned the following year to see the play, he was honored to be introduced to the Mayor of Altenburg, the Prime Minister of Education for all of Germany,

and the runner-up in their last presidential election.

Tom was a fixer around the house and enjoyed working on his own cars far into his 80s. He also enjoyed ice cream, cherry pie, puzzles, serving in the church, and studying the Bible with the help of commentaries and encyclopedias. He will be missed by many friends and loved ones. A full video of Tom's funeral and interment with military honors is available online for viewing and download at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/13pysGZfIyNeuCipP6epKhoal1z3296eV/view?usp=drivesdk>

Rosemary Crow

June 30, 1945 – March 16, 2023

Rosemary (Andreotta) Crow, 77, of Katy, Texas, died unexpectedly on Thursday, March 16, 2023, at Memorial Hermann Houston. She was born on June 30, 1945, in Middletown, Ohio, to Angeline and William Andreotta. She was one of three children.



Rosemary was predeceased by her parents, Angeline Andreotta and William Andreotta; and her brother Joseph Andreotta.

She is survived by her high school sweetheart and husband of nearly 57 years, George Crow; sister, Vicki Summers (Dave Lakes); sisters-in-law, Nathalie Andreotta and Mardic (Crow) Bergen; and sons, Richard Crow (Tracy) and William Crow (Kari); six grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Rosemary graduated from Fenwick High School in 1963 where she graduated second in her class and was homecoming queen. She later earned her bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Dayton and worked in the field for several years. She considered being a wife, mother, and "Grandma Rosey" her greatest joy in life.

She was an active member of her local church, a cancer survivor, and a stranger to no one.

⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."⁵⁵ "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"

1 Corinthians 15

What's going on in your local church area? Combined services? Public Bible studies? Potlucks? Church activities? Celebrations? Memorials? Visiting ministers? Baptisms? Ordinations? Evangelistic campaigns? Birth or death announcements? Let us know, and perhaps we can publish it under "Church News." We'd love to hear from you!

The Editor

Open Church Policy

The Church of God International is an open church.

We have many people attending who are new in the faith. Some will not always keep each of God's laws as they should, and some will not believe everything we teach. We pray that they may be strengthened through the services we render and the examples we set as they come to a closer walk with their God. We request that you be neither judgmental nor base your standard for obedience on what you see your brother do. Christ is our standard, not weak and sinful men. Always remember that you will be judged for what you do, not what others do. Your job is to pray for them, set the right example, and please the Father in all that you do.

Leaders Gather for Ministerial Conference in the Philippines

QUEZON CITY, THE PHILIPPINES—A Ministers/Leaders conference was held at Richmond Hotel, Eastwood City Cyberpark, Quezon City, on April 30–May 1, 2023. The ministers delivered lectures on the first day (April 30), and the second day (May 1) was dedicated to frequently-asked-questions and group discussions on various issues and questions.

In the morning session, Mr. Winston Co opened the conference with a lecture on the Duties and Responsibilities of Ministers and Deacons, including those given “Speaking Credentials,” going through Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, while Mr. Rene Corpuz discussed the CGI’s perspective and teaching on the Ordination of Ministers and Deacons as well as the Code of Conduct expected of the Ministry/Church Leaders, going through the “Ministerial Handbook” and “Guidelines for Field Churches.”

In the afternoon session, Mr. Elinio Mellomida discussed what Ministers and Deacons can undertake in their local areas, such as conducting Bible studies, visiting, anointing, and to encourage the local membership to participate, to be more active in the “preaching of the gospel.” Mr. Melchor Arcinas then gave a lecture on how those assigned to speak can



23 leaders attended the recent two-day Ministerial Conference in the Philippines.

prepare/deliver better messages, reminding everyone to be less speculative, study the Bible more, to avoid “copying or using” other people’s style of delivery but rather find their own style, and to submit drafts of their messages to the assigned minis-

ter in their area.

On the second day, Mr. Winston Co led the discussion on various FAQs in the conduct of Bible studies and gave tips and pointers on what are good Bible topics and what are the common questions to be prepared for.

The session was closed by a questions-and-answers session covering various questions by participants.

The Conference was attended by 23 ministers and leaders from various congregations in the Philippines.

Eight Graduate from Bible School in Nyanza, Kenya

Mark records the very last meeting of Jesus Christ with His disciples on the Mount of Olives prior to His visible ascension to heaven.

“So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19).

Before this, however, while Jesus was on the cross, before His last breath He declared, “It is finished,” and indeed He had finished what He came to do. Matthew records this very last encouraging experience with Jesus Christ: “And Jesus

came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mathew 28:18).

It was then that Jesus gave His disciples the “great commission,” upon which premise we derive our mission statement: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with



The first eight students to graduate from Christian Bible Centre in Nyanza, Kenya

you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Mathew 28:19–20).

It was for this reason that Christian Bible Centre was established—to make disciples by teaching what Christ taught and equipping all for ministry. Paul confirms the various assignments and gifts given to each person in order to accomplish this noble duty:

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists;

and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–13).

Seven months ago, Christian Bible Centre located in Nyanza, in the southern part of Kenya, opened its doors to

the first twenty Bible school students. Due to financial constraints, six dropped on the way, and another six did not qualify for graduation, leaving eight qualified students who graduated on April 22, 2023, having fulfilled and met the Eldership requirements. The eight were ordained on the same day.

Linda Benton, on behalf of Christian Educational Ministries (co-sponsor of the program with the Church of God International), participated in officiating the event.

The topics covered in the program are in line with the Ministerial Integration Program approved by the Church of God International’s Ministerial Council. Emphasis was on the servant leadership model, the Feasts of the Lord picturing the plan of redemption, biblical doctrines, public speaking, evangelism, discipleship, and worship services. Some materials were from Christian Educational Ministries.

Robert Onsando

Newly Ordained Elder to Serve Churches in Tanzania and Malawi

This mentorship journey started in 2019. Brother Emanuel Chagali's name was forwarded to me by Elder Mike James, overseas coordinator for the Church of God International. Emmanuel is a high school music teacher and former Seventh-Day Adventist. A new phase in his spiritual journey began when he started experiencing doctrinal challenges with the Adventist church. The most unfortunate thing was that he was an employee at a church school. For fear of losing his employment, it took him some

time before coming out openly with his concerns. But when the right time came Emanuel resigned and, as fate has it, he got employed by the Tanzanian government as a teacher and posted in a neighboring government high school.

Emanuel contacted CGI headquarters for doctrinal help. His email landed in Elder Mike's desk. Elder Mike embraced him and later redirected him to me (Robert



Elder Chagali

Onsando, director of the church's work in Africa).

Since that time I started mentoring brother Chagali, and when the right time came, I traveled for three days to meet brother Chagali at Mbeya, Southern part of Tanzania, next to Malawi and Zambia. After an overnight Bible study, I was satisfied that he was ready for ordination, having been ordained and given the mandate to do the same to my brothers in

Africa.

Sabbath, March 11, was the day that God had made for the ordination of brother Emanuel. The ordination was witnessed by the congregation and supported by Emmanuel's wife, and the whole church said "Amen."

Emanuel will support our work in Tanzania and Malawi which is very close to where he lives. The uniqueness in Emanuel is the language; he is one of the very few people in Tanzania who speak Swahili.

Robert Onsando

Hope Comes to London, Ontario

The message of **Hope in a Hopeless World** came to London, Ontario, at a two-day outreach sponsored by CGI Canada, at the Best Western Hotel and Conference Centre in one of the province's fastest-growing cities with a population of 422,000 people.

CGI Canada established a congregation in London in the early 1990s. Over the years, the congregation has been small but with a stable membership. The latest campaign has been part of effort over the years, to increase its membership, as the congregation is among many CGI congregations with an aging membership.

It has always been a challenge to boost the London membership, especially among the young people, many of whom are students at one of Canadians' best known medical schools, the University of Western Ontario.

Elders Bernard Wilson, Rick Dubler, and Horane Smith serve as pastors for the London congregation, using the plurality of eldership model adopted by CGI congregations in Canada. The congregation received its first resident elder in January 2021, when Bernard Wilson, who was already living in London, successfully completed the MAP programme. The pastoral team organized a series of local outreaches last year, despite the setbacks with the pandemic, and decided to stage a much bigger one for this year.

With this in mind, Canada's Evangelism Department, headed by

Elder Jim French and Manager Zion Hezekiah, started working with the pastoral team in January, this year, to organize the largest outreach for London in recent years. The aim was to reach as many people as possible in London and its environs, especially those among the younger demographics. Advertisements about the outreach, "Hope in a Hopeless World," were carried on Google, Facebook, and local newspapers. Congregations and elders from nearby Kitchener, Toronto, Burlington, and Kawartha Lakes joined the London brethren for the event.

The outreach began on Friday, April 21, with two opening presentations, first by Elder Murray Palmatier, who spoke on the reality and extent of the hopelessness facing the world's population. He examined the underlying factors that contribute to the current state of hopelessness, such as disengagement, poor relationships, superficial understanding of the harsh realities of life, avoidance of prophetic texts about hopelessness, lack of the human purpose of life, trauma and adversity, and a society overcome by sin.

For his part, Elder Ken Allen provided some practical tips to deal with hopelessness. He suggested that for the physical aspect, attention must be paid to nutrition, exercise, supplements and building proper relationships. On the spiritual side, Elder Allen emphasized the importance of understanding the



Singers proclaiming hope in songs of praise

prophetic implications, the purpose of life, rewards for repenting and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and how to attain peace in Christ.

After both presentations, Pastor Adrian Davis moderated a roundtable discussion among the eldership consisting of Elders Bill Watson, Ken Allen, Murray Palmatier, Bernard Wilson, Horane Smith, Rick Dubler, and visiting Jamaican pastor George Ramocan, who also served in Canada for some time. It was staged in front of a live audience and live streamed on Zoom, YouTube, and Rumble

(Burlington congregation's sponsored Keep Watch programme). Pastor Davis asked each elder on the panel to comment on Hope in a Hopeless World. The conclusion among the leaders was the world lives on a false hope and true hope can only be found in Jesus Christ and His coming Kingdom.

The Saturday programme began at 10:30 AM with a presentation by Elder Watson on Hope in a Hopeless World from the perspective of the church and its members. He emphasized the need for the ministry to be bold in proclaiming the World of God, despite the opposition, persecution, and attempts to silence the voice of the church from an ever-increasing hostility from governments, the media, and political entities. He encouraged the ministry, and members alike, to be courageous in defending the Bible, and what it stands for, as it warns the nations that true hope lies in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. He added that instead of getting better, the hostilities would get worse.

Pastor George Ramocan returned after the lunch break to continue the same theme of true hope from the biblical/futuristic perspective. He painted a grim picture of the efforts to reach the nations with the true gospel mes-



Attendees enjoying lunch at between morning and afternoon sessions

Continued on back page

sage of hope. Pastor Ramocan then outlined God’s plan to redeem humanity from its fall and how the nations will eventually come to understand who God is, what He stands for, and how He will eventually establish His

world-ruing government.

Fifty-one people attended the opening night; 105 attended the Saturday morning session; and 111 in the afternoon. Twelve new visitors attended the two-day event.

“This reminds me of the old times,” one member said, in relation to past outreaches.

“This is good. I’ve learned a lot today,” said one visitor nearby.

It is hoped that the London event

would be the beginning of similar outreaches across the province and country in the coming months and year as the church tries to reach out to more people, despite the challenges.

Horane Smith



CGI elders who participated in the outreach, left to right: Bernard Wilson, Bill Watson, George Ramocan, Kenroy Allen, Adrian Davis, Horane Smith, Rick Dubler, Murray Palmatier



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